

Message Text

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SUBJECT: SOUTH AFRICAN/ISRAELI RELATIONS AND THE VORSTER VISIT

REF: (A) TEL AVIV 2401, (B) TEL AVIV 2717, (C) CAPE TOWN 0435,
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BEGIN SUMMARY: THE SOUTH AFRICAN/ISRAELI RELATIONSHIP, HIGH-
LIGHTED BY THE VORSTER VISIT TO ISRAEL, IS BASED ON MUTUAL
INTEREST IN CLOSER ECONOMIC, COMMERCIAL AND MILITARY COOPERATION.
ISRAEL'S PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO SOUTH AFRICA IS LARGELY
INFLUENCED BY ITS DEEP SENSE OF ISOLATION AND THE WIDELY-HELD
VIEW THAT ISRAEL IS ENTITLED TO FIND SUPPORT WHEREVER IT CAN.
FROM THE ISRAELI VIEWPOINT, THE PRESENT AND POTENTIAL TANGIBLE
ADVANTAGES OF TIES WITH SOUTH AFRICA OUTWEIGH THE POSSIBLE
NEGATIVE REPERCUSSIONS IN THE FORM OF EUROPEAN/US CRITICISM
OR ARAB/THIRD WORLD MOVES AGAINST ISRAEL IN THE UNGA. WHILE
FOREIGN MINISTER ALLON AND MAPAM WERE DISCOMFITED BY THE
VORSTER VISIT, THE DOMINANT GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC ATTITUDE
SEEMS TO HAVE RUN FROM FAVORABLE TO NEUTRAL. IN OUR
JUDGMENT ISRAEL PROBABLY HAS UNDERSTIMATED THE NEGATIVE
INTERNATIONAL IMPACT OF ITS SOUTH AFRICAN LINK AND HAS
PERHAPS RAISED DOUBTS IN BLACK AFRICA ABOUT THE IMPLICATIONS
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OF U.S. SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL. AS ISRAEL'S INTERNATIONAL

ISOLATION DEEPENS, WE ANTICIPATE THAT IT WILL CONTINUE TO FOSTER AND EXTEND ITS LINKS WITH SOUTH AFRICA. END SUMMARY

1. THE VORSTER VISIT TO ISRAEL IS PART OF A SOUTH AFRICAN/ISRAELI RELATIONSHIP WHICH WAS INTENSIFIED SINCE THE OCTOBER 1973 WAR AND WHICH IS CHARACTERIZED BY MUTUAL INTEREST IN CLOSER ECONOMIC, COMMERCIAL AND MILITARY COOPERATION. ISRAEL LOOKS TO SOUTH AFRICA AS A RAPIDLY INCREASING EXPORT MARKET AND AS A MAIN SOURCE OF ROUGH DIAMONDS, ORES AND METALS, WHILE SOUTH AFRICA COULD HOPE TO GAIN ACCESS TO ISRAELI ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY AND PERHAPS MILITARY HARDWARE. (IN 1975 ISRAELI/SOUTH AFRICAN TRADE AMOUNTED TO ABOUT \$40 MILLION EACH WAY, EXCLUDING MILITARY PRODUCTS AND ROUGH DIAMONDS WHICH ARE IMPORTED VIA LONDON.) THIS RELATIONSHIP HAS BEEN BASED IN LARGE PART UPON THE EXTENSIVE PERSONAL, FAMILY AND RELIGIOUS TIES WHICH EXIST BETWEEN ISRAELIS AND SOUTH AFRICA'S JEWISH CITIZENS. THE SOUTH AFRICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY IS AMONG THE STRONGEST SUPPORTERS OF THIS COUNTRY AND SENDS SIZEABLE REMITTANCES TO ISRAEL, FOR WHICH THE GOI IS THANKFUL. WHILE THE EXTENT OF SOUTH AFRICAN/ISRAELI MILITARY COOPERATION IS HARD TO PIN DOWN, THERE CAN BE LITTLE DOUBT THAT THESE LINKS HAVE BEEN EXTENDED SINCE THE OCTOBER WAR.

2. DETAILS OF THE SCIENTIFIC PORTION OF THE AGREEMENT SIGNED DURING THE VISIT ARE UNKNOWN AT THIS TIME, BUT THERE ARE SEVERAL AREAS THAT WOULD BE NATURAL FOR SOUTH AFRICAN/ISRAELI COOPERATION. NUCLEAR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT IS PROBABLY THE MOST PROMINENT OF THESE, WHICH COULD ALSO INCLUDE AGRICULTURE, IRRIGATION AND DESALINATION. IN FACT, HERBERT A. SMITH IN ARTICLE IN APRIL 19 ISSUE OF INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE STATED THERE WAS "...SPECULATION THAT SOUTH AFRICA HAD AGREED TO PROVIDE ISRAEL WITH SUPPLIES OF URANIUM AS PART OF THE EXCHANGE AGREEMENT." ISRAEL'S HIGHLY TRAINED NUCLEAR SCIENTISTS COMBINED WITH SOUTH AFRICAN SCIENTISTS AND NATURAL RESOURCES WOULD HAVE BETWEEN THEM THE INGREDIENTS TO DEVELOP A COMPLETELY INDEPENDENT NUCLEAR FUEL CYCLE CAPABILITY FOR USE IN BOTH CIVILIAN POWER AND MILITARY WEAPONS APPLICATIONS.

3. THE POLITICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ADDITION TO THE ABOVE
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FACTORS IN THE ISRAELI/SOUTH AFRICAN RELATIONSHIP IS THE BELIEF THAT, FOR ALL THEIR DIFFERENCES, THE TWO COUNTRIES SHARE AN UNSOUGHT COMMON DESTINY AS VIRTUAL PARIAHS IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY. WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE REGIONS, THEY FIND THEMSELVES ISOLATED AND SURROUNDED BY POTENTIAL OR ACTUAL ENEMIES.

4. THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT, DESPITE THESE LINKS WITH SOUTH

AFRICA, HAS TRIED TO MINIMIZE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE VORSTER VISIT. SOME ISRAELIS MAINTAIN THAT THE VISIT WILL HAVE LITTLE IF ANY BEARING ON WHETHER BLACK AFRICAN STATES RESTORE THEIR DIPLOMATIC TIES WITH ISRAEL. WHILE THEY ARE CONCERNED ABOUT ITS POSSIBLE IMPACT ON ARAB/THIRD WORLD ACTIONS IN THE UNGA OR OTHER UN ORGANIZATIONS, THEY HAVE SEEN LITTLE EVIDENCE THUS FAR OF SUCH IMPACT (TEL AVIV 2766). THE MRMORE DOVISH SIDE OF THE RULING LABOR PARTY AND MAPAM HAVE EVINCED SOME CONCERN ABOUT THE EFFECT ON ISRAEL'S INTERNATIONAL IMAGE OF OVER-IDENTIFICATION WITH SOUTH AFRICA, BUT THE GENERAL PUBLIC ATTITUDE TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN LINK SEEMS TO FLUCTUATE FROM FAVORABLE TO NEUTRAL. THERE SEEMS TO BE LITTLE CONCERN HERE ABOUT NEGATIV REACTIONS FROM THE EUROPEAN SOCIALIST PARTIES, ON WHOSE FRIENDSHIP AND SYMPATHY ISRAEL PLACES CONSIDERABLE IMPORTANCE NOR HAS THERE BEEN ANY SIGNIFICANT PUBLIC DISCUSSION HERE AS TO HOW THE ISRAELI/SOUTH AFRICAN LINK MAY AFFECT OUR AFRICAN POLICY, ALTHOUGH A SENIOR MFA OFFICIAL (ANUG) ADMITTED THAT EARLY DISCUSSION OF THE VISIT WITH WASHINGTON WOULD HAVE BEEN HELPFUL.

5. FROM OUR PERSPECTIVE, IT APPEARS THAT SOUTH AFRICA PROBABLY GAINED MORE THAN ISRAEL FROM THE VORSTER VISIT.

INDEED, CONTRARY TO THE CLAIM OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN POLITICAL COUNSELOR IN TEL AVIV THAT THE VISIT HAD BEEN AGREED UPON A YEAR AGO (REFTEL B PARA 11), WE BELIEVE - AS ALLON HIMSELF TOLD US (REFTEL A) - THAT VORSTER RATHER FORCED HIMSELF ON THE ISRAELIS BY INFORMING THEM THAT HE WAS COMING TO ISRAEL ON A PILGRIMAGE. THE GOI, FACED WITH A VIRTUAL FAIT ACCOMPLI, FELT IT HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO AGREE, AND ALLON TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT HE WAS DISTINCTLY UNHAPPY ABOUT THE VISIT. RABIN TRIED TO BLUR THE VISIT'S OFFICIAL CHARACTER
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BY STATING THAT VORSTER WOULD COME TO ISRAEL AS HIS GUEST. OF THE SENIOR LEADERSHIP, DEFENSE MINISTER PERES SEEMED THE LEAST CONCERNED, VIEWING THE PRAGMATIC BENEFITS OF CLOSER TIES RESULTING FROM THE VISIT AS MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANY NEGATIVE FALLOUT FOR ISRAEL'S INTERNATIONAL IMAGE.

6. BEYOND THE BILATERAL ASPECTS, THE VORSTER VISIT MAY ALSO HAVE SERVED BROADER SOUTH AFRICAN OBJECTIVES. ACCORDING TO A PROMINENT ISRAELI JOURNALIST WHO RECENTLY VISITED PRETORIA AS THE GUEST OF THE SAG, VORSTER HOPES TO USE HIS CONNECTION TO ISRAEL AS A WAY OF BREAKING OUT OF HIS INTERNATIONAL ISOLATION. BY GAINING ACCEPTANCE IN JERUSALEM, HE WOULD HOPE INDIRECTLY TO GAIN ACCEPTABILITY FROM EUROPEAN SOCIALIST PARTIES AND GOVERNMENTS. HOWEVER, FROM OUR PERSPECTIVE, IT WOULD SEEM THAT WHATEVER VORSTER DOES OR

DOES NOT ACCOMPLISH, THE EUROPEAN SOCIALISTS ARE LIKELY TO BE QUITE CRITICAL OF THE RABIN GOVERNMENT FOR SO PROMINENTLY HIGHLIGHTING ITS "RAPPROCHEMENT" WITH SOUTH AFRICA.

7. WE BELIEVE THAT SOUTH AFRICAN/ISRAELI TIES ARE LIKELY TO REMAIN STRONG AND MAY EVEN BE STRENGTHENED IN THE YEARS AHEAD, GIVEN THE UNLIKELIHOOD THAT EITHER COUNTRY WILL FIND A WAY TO BREAK OUT OF ITS INTERNATIONAL ISOLATION. THUS, THE FORCES WHICH HAVE LED TO THIS STRANGE PARTNERSHIP IN THE FIRST PLACE SEEM LIKELY TO CONTINUE TO BIND THE TWO COUNTRIES TOGETHER.
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